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William Rainey Harper

For the third time since the foundation of the *American Journal of Theology* the ranks of the editorial staff have been invaded by death. William Rainey Harper passed from this life January 10, 1906, in the fiftieth year of his age. His early death brought to an end a career marked with energy, versatility, geniality, and large achievement.

Mr. Harper began his career as graduate student and as teacher in the field of the Greek and Latin classics, and to the end of his life retained a deep interest in classical studies. But his great work for scholarship was done in the Semitic field. Entering at the age of twenty-two upon the teaching of Hebrew in a theological school, he pursued his work with such skill, devotion, and energy, that he created, first in the school with which he was connected, and then throughout the country, a genuine revival of the study of Hebrew. Gradually broadening the field of his own activities to include on the one hand the other Semitic languages, and on the other the critical and historical study of the Old Testament, he achieved in these fields also results scarcely less significant. Extending his interest, though not his own personal work, to the New Testament, and eventually to religious education in general, he did more, perhaps, than any man of his generation to promote the study of the Bible among the people.

But his sympathies and his intelligent co-operation were not confined to the special field of his own studies. Though not himself a graduate of, or even a student in, a theological school, and not widely read in any field of theological study except the Old Testament, he was for nearly fifteen years head of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, and in that position wrought most intelligently and effectively for the promotion of the interests of theological education. Alike in matters affecting the curriculum of the school, in the selection of men for positions in the faculty, and in his relations to the work of his colleagues, he manifested keen insight, intelligent sympathy, and a broad and catholic spirit.

In the dual position of President of the University and of its Divinity School, he maintained with admirable poise the middle course between undue prejudice in favor of that school with which his own teaching most closely allied him and the sacrifice of its interests to those of the University at large. Especially valuable was the service which he rendered to the Divinity School in his defense of the principle, hitherto rarely recognized in America, that a theological school ought to, and for its highest development must, enjoy the same measure of academic freedom that is granted to other schools of the university. Fully recognizing the rights of the past and the duty of the theological school to fit men for practical efficiency in the ministry of the present, he as steadily defended the right of the members of the theological faculty to pursue their investigations without fear and to teach without restraint that which, as the result of such investigation, they had been led to accept.

Consistently with his recognition and defense of the rights of theological scholarship, President Harper maintained the legitimacy of the existence of a theological school in the University. Believing in the necessity of religion to life, and in the university as an agency for the betterment of life, he held that a school devoted to the discovery and promulgation of the truth in the realm of religion, and to the training of men for the work of proclaiming this truth, had a place in a university inferior in legitimacy and importance to that of no other division of it.

Believing in scholarly research, President Harper believed not less firmly in the necessity of publishing the results of scholarly

work. In the early days of his career, as a teacher of Hebrew he supplemented the instruction of his classroom by teaching, by correspondence, and through the printed page. To this period of his life belong the founding of the *Hebrew Student*, now known as the *Biblical World*,¹ and *Hebraica*, now called the *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*. And when he was charged with the task of organizing a new university, he made publication one of the three great divisions of its work, co-ordinate with that of resident instruction and university extension. To the periodicals above named, which he brought to the University, there were added under his fostering care journals in the various fields of scientific research. It was in pursuance of this same policy that in 1896 he led the Divinity Faculty in the establishment of the *American Journal of Theology*, and advocated from the first to the last a broad and generous policy for its conduct, in accordance with which its pages have been open to scholars in all divisions of the field of theological science, and to writers of all schools and shades of opinion. In no enterprise to which he put his hand did he cherish a deeper interest than in the maintenance of this *Journal* upon a high plane of scholarly excellence and usefulness to the cause of theological learning.

His colleagues, to whom there falls the responsibility for carrying forward without his personal presence and help that work in which he was formerly their associate and leader, desire here to record their deep affection and sincere respect for him, their reverence for his memory, and their allegiance to the ideals of which he was ever the steadfast exponent and defender.

¹ The *Biblical World* for March, 1906, is devoted wholly to memorials of President Harper, and contains fuller and more definite information concerning his career than is here presented.